# [I am Reaping in Tears]

[Life Story]

I AM REAPING IN TEARS WHAT I SOWED IN FUN

A Depression Victim Story

Written by: Mrs. Ada [Radford?]

Augusta

Edited by: Mrs. Leila H. Harris

Supervising Editor

Georgia Writers' Project

Area 7

Augusta, Georgia

[Mrs. Mary Louise o'Keefe?]

[1902 Savannah Road?]

[Augusta, Georgia?]

Mar. 22, 1940

[A. R.?]

[I AM REAPING IN TEARS WHAT I SOWED IN FUN?]

## Library of Congress

“What, again! I don't think you should drink so much wine. Why aren't you at work?”

“I worked last night; some new parts of the machinery had to be installed and I'm off today.”

“Go home and go to bed, boy! You look like a ghost.

The foregoing conversation was a great surprise to me. I had known of Frances Carter for years and thought her absolutely indifferent as to what became of anything or anybody.

She turned to speak to me as the door closed behind the young man and after we had exchanged greetings, I remarked upon the unusual situation of a storekeeper refusing to market her wares. At the same time adding a word of commendation for the stand she had taken.

She looked at me rather strangely and said:

“Oh! I guess I'm not so bad at heart. Of course I'm in business to sell and also for the money I can get out of it. However, I'd much rather not sell to a young man like him for I know his physical condition.”

Frances Carter and her son, Sam, were busy waiting on an ever-increasing stream of customers that poured into this combination grocery and liquor store. At one time this was one of the outstanding businesses in Augusta's environs.

I had arrived at a very unpropitious time. It was pay day 2 at three of the nearby manufacturing plants and everybody seemed eager to spend money.

My client was much too occupied to pay me any attention and my interest centered upon a negro boy who walked in briskly and asked for a package of Chesterfield cigarettes.

“There stands the machine, boy.” Mrs. Carter said a little impatiently. “Put your money in the slot and learn to operate it. What you got?”

Very much [crestfallen?] over the ordeal of manipulating the machine, the boy said meekly:

“I'se got two nickels and a dime.”

“Put your money in the slot and pull the lever where you see ‘Chesterfield cigarettes.’”

“All right, Miss Frances. But which one of these holes does I put my nickel in?”

With a much kinder manner than I would have thought possible she explained the [intricacies?] of the machine. He pulled the lever very lightly with an almost terrified expression on his face as though he expected something to jump out and grab him. How relieved he appeared when he saw the cigarettes in the opening.

“Look and see if your change is in the pack.” said Mrs. Carter. He looked and so did I. Sure enough the correct change was there. I couldn't help remarking.

“Why that machine operates with almost human intelligence.”

3

“It certainly does,” Mrs. Carter answered. “It also hands out matches, but we are out of them at present. And say, does it save me dollars! I don't sell cigarettes. The machine handles all of the sales and nobody can ask for credit. That device's motto is ‘no money - no cigarettes.’

“Before I bought it people would come in, buy a pint of whiskey and after they paid for it they'd want a package of cigarettes on credit. As most of them never remembered to pay, there went my profit as well as some of my principal, for I haven't ever learned to say, ‘no.’”

The influx continued. Some were paying bills and all seemed to be buying drinks. In the center of the room a large pool table with its two players was surrounded by spectators.

Mrs. Carter came over and started to talk to me but only for a moment, for her attention was attracted by two men who had come in.

“Will you excuse me?” She asked hurriedly. “When they come in we always play cards for coca-colas.”

I watched as they played. She lost and the drinks were on the house.

Mrs. Carter just laughed and said:

“Just my luck, boys. What will you have?”

She turned to me and explained. “We play cards four or five times a day for drinks.”

“Do you always lose?” I asked.

4

“Oh no! I win quite often and enjoy the fun of playing.”

Here another group of customers arrived and she was off to serve them. By this time I realized that pay day was the wrong time to try to talk to anybody who was doing such a rushing business, so I asked if I might return on Monday.

“Yes, I really think it would be better for on pay days we are very busy.”

I had had quite some time to look around the old store with its adjoining residence. One corner was petitioned partitioned off for a liquor store, whose fixtures included a foot-rail, so [prevalent?] in the saloons of previous years. In the rear of the store a stairway led to what I learned later, was a large dining hall, where Mrs. Carter had formerly operated

a night club. She [had catered?] to parties who made reservations for an evening of dancing and fun. Because of ill health she had been forced to close it. The entrance to the residence is through a long hall that leads to the dining room and kitchen on the first floor. Another stairway gives on to a second floor where there are thirteen rooms and a bath. The entire floor is handsomely furnished and [represents?] an outlay of many dollars.

Bright and early Monday morning I was there again. This time Mrs. Carter was seated by an electric heater, crocheting a bedspread for her niece, who is to be married in June. Mrs. Carter is rather attractive with her wavy, blonde, bobbed hair and smiling, blue eyes.

5

She continued to crochet as we talked.

“I was born February 9, 1882, at [Macksvilla?], [Avoryeles Parish?], Louisiana, oldest in a family of six children. My father, Wiley Cain, was a farmer and my mother, Terresa Cain, taught a private school which had an enrollment of 48 pupils. I received such a good foundation by studying for my first three years with my mother.

“When I was nine years old my parents moved to Augusta and my father secured a job with the city which he retained until his death in 1898.

“My parents were Catholics and I attended the Sacred Heart Academy.

“No, I didn't finish High School. Six months before graduation my father died and I had to stop and go to work. I worked at the Augusta Bee hive until I married Herbert Carter in 1903.

“My husband, who was a cotton buyer for the Planters' Compress Company at the time of our marriage went to work the following year for the Georgia Railroad. He didn't like railroad work and in a very short time he got a job as warehouseman at the Atlantic Warehouse. He was manager there for a number of years.

## Library of Congress

“I conceived the idea that I would like to launch out into the business world about the time my husband went to work for the Georgia Railroad, so I opened a grocery store on [Wrightsboro?] Road.

“From the very first I had a thriving business and before very long I had to enlarge my store. When I had been in business for about three years my son was born.

6

“Up until that time my business was purely an experiment - something I just wanted to do. I already had a good bank account, but now I wanted to swell it. My boy must have every advantage money could give him. Then I began to study and plan for big business. I had three clerks and enough business to keep two delivery trucks and several bicycles busy. My sales averaged $75. a day on week days and from $150 to $200 on Saturdays.

“In 1907 fire destroyed my place and I had very little insurance. The owner decided to build an apartment house on the lot and if I opened again I would have to find another location. My husband was still at the Atlantic Warehouse making a good salary and I decided to just keep my home.

“I longed to be in business again, however, and in 1911 we bought this corner and rebuilt the place at a cost of $16,000. We put in $2,000 worth of groceries and installed a barroom in the rear. We had a room for games behind the saloon.

“We had a prosperous business from the beginning. Our customers, white and colored, worked in the plants nearby and they bought their groceries and drinks from us. On pay day the managers would collect and we never lost a dime. It was just the same as a cash business.

“Our bank deposits were from $400 to $500 a month. This represented clear profit and was from the grocery business alone. My husband handled the finances from the bar. Those were indeed days of prosperity.

7

“It was nothing for my husband and me to go on a party and spend from one to two hundred dollars in a single evening. In 1919 my husband was worth $200,000, and we were still going strong when the 18th Amendment was passed. The bar had to be closed but we continued in the grocery business. Our trade decreased about 50%.

“Then the serpent entered my garden of Eden in the form of a woman. I know my husband loved his boy and me but he just couldn't resist. He was weak enough to fall for their line and just wouldn't see that his money was all they were after. Finally we separated in 1920 and I got this place in the divorce settlement.

“Herbert was still at the warehouse, but he wasn't interested in my business and I began to lose money. He refused to take the money due me out of the men's pay.

“I became so worried that I was completely unfit to run a business. One day I checked up and found I had lost $8,000. I rented the store, sold my stock at a loss and moved to The Hill.

“The man who operated the place made expenses and a small profit, but after four years he was more than willing to turn the business over to me and I reopened with a complete stock of groceries. I tried to operate a cash business but soon learned that a part at least would have to be credit.

“For a while my business was fair, I was breaking better than even and living well. After two to three years of comparative ease - along came the depression!

8

“One by one the plants closed. Then the International Agricultural Corporation closed and the farmers couldn't get a dime. People were out of work with nowhere to go and nothing to eat. The only plant that remained open was the Buckeye Oil Mill and a number of their employees were cut off and the the rest of them worked only three days a weeks.

“I had a mixed trace, some of the folks had spent their money with me for years and I couldn't refuse to help them now that they needed me. We all thought the trouble was only temporary and that the plants would open again in a few weeks or months at the longest, and then business would adjust itself.

“I never dreamed it would last until my shelves were empty and my drawing account dwindled. Still hoping against hope I kept on buying and selling on credit until my last dollar was gone. I had $6,000 in diamonds; one ring alone was worth $3,300. I sold all of them with the exception of my engagement and wedding rings.

“Then one day my husband wandered into the store and asked me to lend him a dollar. I complied gladly but he never lived to spend it. He just sat down in one of the chairs and died - a broke, disappointed man.

“Yes, I buried him and I had to do that on credit. You see, he was still my husband and the father of my child, regardless of divorce laws.”

9

“What happened to him, how did he lose all of his money?”

“Well, it's a long, painful story that I don't like to think about. When the warehouse closed he had nothing to employ his mind. He married one damn crook, quit her and went to California with another. For this last offense he was put in jail for violation of the White Slave Law. This cost him plenty before he was free to return to Augusta.

“Then he got in with Barrett and Company and we all lost this time. I had [$8,000?] invested and had endorsed notes for him amounting to [$16,000?]. I am still paying on them.”

“How is your business at the present time?” I asked.

“Rotten! I take in around $200 a month and my overhead is approximately $300. I am nearly crazy and don't know which way to turn. The chain stores have just about ruined the independent ones. During the week people buy from me on credit, then when they get their cash on Saturday they go and spend it at the [A & P and Rogers?].

“About two years ago I opened a night club and installed a heating system that cost me $700. I really made good and would have soon paid my debts, but it came near killing me. I couldn't burn the candle at both ends. I tried to work in the store all day and in the club at night.”

“Why couldn't your son help you?” I asked her.

“You see, he is far from well and then, too, he is not dependable. He stays drunk for weeks at a time.”

10

“That's terrible for you. It must keep you worried all the time.”

“Yes, It does.” She said somewhat sadly. “But I had it coming. When he began to talk, we would sit him on the counter of the bar and give him wine and sometimes whiskey to drink. We also taught him to curse. It was funny then, but I have lived to regret it and am reaping in tears what I sowed in fun a few years ago.

“No, he has never married. He has been going with a girl for eleven years and she is fine. I like her and she thinks a lot of him. But he will never marry her. She is the only child and

her mother is a widow, who dips snuff and is absolutely ignorant. My boy just couldn't marry and mix me up with a woman like that."

'Mrs. Carter, you have a liquor store here. How did you get the license? Do they issue liquor licenses to women?"

"No, the license is in my son's name.

"What do I think caused the depressions? Well, I don't know, I haven't give it much thought. I was too busy trying to fight my way out and make a dollar for myself. [We?] all owe President Roosevelt a tremendous debt for pulling us throught this far and we want him for another term. If we don't get him, or someone like him, if that were possible, who will carry out his ideas and plans, we are headed for plenty of trouble.

"And you say the final question is what I think of women in 11 business. Well, I think they make good managers. As a rule they use more judgment and are much more considerate, especially in the liquor business. About 75% of the homes were saved during the depression by wives, who planned and sacrificed in order to keep a roof over their heads. When a man gets in trouble it takes a woman to pull him out. Take me for example. My husband came to me for help and died under the roof I had saved for myself and my boy.